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SUBJECT: USAU: AFRICA COMMAND DEPUTY MEETS WITH AU
COMMISSION CHAIR PING

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

1.(C) Summary: Ambassador Mary Yates, Deputy to the Commander for Civil-Military Activities at AFRICOM, met on March 25 with African Union Commission Chairperson Jean Ping at AU headquarters. She reiterated Gen Ward,s message of the importance of close consultation with the African Union in order to inform command security programs. They discussed the disturbing trend of unconstitutional changes of government on the continent, USG-AU divergence on Sudan policy particularly with regard to the International Criminal Court's arrest warrant for President Bashir, and the security and political situation in Somalia as well as AMISOM's role in maintaining peace there. End Summary.

12. (U) In her first face-to-face meeting with Jean Ping since he assumed the post of Chairperson of the AU Commission (AUC) in April 2008, Ambassador Yates congratulated Ping for his first year in office and expressed the USG's intent to support AU capacity-building to confront the challenges the organization is facing on the continent. Ambassador Yates, who was accompanied by Ambassador Yamamoto, CJTF-HOA Commander Anthony Kurta, and USAU and AFRICOM advisers, received a status report from Ping and some of his senior advisers on recent peace and security developments in Africa.

13. (C) Peace and security, one of the AU's four pillars in the organization's current strategic plan, occupies two-thirds of Ping's time. The other pillars are: development and cooperation, shared values, and institutional development. The AUC lacks financial and human resources to adequately address all these priorities, Ping readily admits. While many of the more than one dozen conflicts that raged in the early 1990s have since been resolved, two difficult conflicts remain in Darfur and Somalia, and the threat of terrorism persists from Mauritania to Somalia, Ping said.

Unconstitutional Changes of Government

14. (C) One of the most disturbing trends on the continent of late is the phenomenon of unconstitutional changes of government. Unconstitutional takeovers in Mauritania, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, and most recently, Madagascar, worry Ping, even though AU member states have collectively condemned these illegal actions and suspended those states from taking part in AU activities until constitutional order is restored. Yates complimented the AU for taking a principled stand in this regard, saying it demonstrates

leadership throughout the continent.

15. (C) Ping said the six-year-old AU that replaced the Organization of African Unity is seeking to get Africans to accept and promote values of democracy, respect for human rights, good governance, and the rule of law. "They are in our Charter. African countries themselves have accepted these values," he said. The only problem, he added, is that Africans have not yet "internalized" these universal values. Ping said he tells those who might see the AU as interfering in their domestic affairs that African member states elected him to protect their own laws.

16. (C) The case of Mauritania, where the military drove President Abdallahi out of office in August 2008, best illustrates how the AU and the international community can team up to condemn coup leaders and pressure them to restore constitutional order, Ping said. In a moment of extreme candor, Ping criticized Libyan leader and current AU Chairperson Qadhafi for supporting the Mauritanian junta. Qadhafi's endorsement of the junta is in direct opposition to the AU's Peace and Security Council, which voted earlier this week to direct the AUC to establish a list of coup leaders and supporters to be sanctioned. Ambassador Yates acknowledged that Qadhafi's stance on Mauritania was making things complicated. Ping noted the AU's appreciation for the U.S. taking the same principled stand at the AU and not wavering as others are doing.

17. (C) Yates and Ping also discussed the drug trafficking

ADDIS ABAB 00000734 002 OF 003

problem and the role the AU is playing to combat it. In West African states such as Guinea and Guinea-Bissau, drugs manufactured in Latin America and in Africa are destroying the fabric of society. Ping agreed with this assessment, but added that the AU lacks the means to counter the problem. The AU suspects that drug trafficking interests may have been behind the killings of Guinea-Bissau's president and military leader in February, Ping said. He appealed for U.S. help in addressing the problem. Yates said the Africa Command will work on drug interdiction with the Department of State and with those who wish to partner with us. Asked if he thought there could be another coup d'etat in Guinea, Ping responded that "everything is possible" in Guinea.

Challenges Facing Somalia

18. (C) Turning to Somalia, Ping assessed that the U.S. and the AU share the same position. For the AU, the problem is a lack of human and financial resources to tackle the crisis. He reviewed the AMISOM troop strength and his efforts to persuade other countries to contribute troops to the peacekeeping mission. He said he had spoken to Arab states and told them that even if they do not want to deploy their troops to Somalia, they should at least consider contributing funds, equipment, food rations, uniforms, or training. Yemen reportedly has committed to offer training to the Somali joint security forces and the AU will ask that Saudi Arabia do the same, Ping said.

19. (C) Although barely a month old, the new Somali government has worked well with the AU, Ping said. In his view, Al Qaida's threat against AMISOM will result in a deeper rift between Somali President Sheikh Sharif and Al Shabaab extremists who consider him a traitor. In his talks with Arab leaders, Ping said he tells them that Al Shabaab are their enemies, not the AU's enemies, and Arab states should stop funding these groups. Ping added that he thought Qadhafi could play a positive role in countering Al Shabaab's threat, but he did not believe Sheikh Sharif would bow to pressure and ask that AMISOM troops withdraw from Mogadishu.

¶10. (C) The priority in Somalia now is to build local security forces so that they can eventually protect the Somali government and people, Ping said. He emphasized that those forces should not only be trained, but paid as well. When that time comes, AMISOM will not need to stay, Ping added. He acknowledged the unlikelihood that the UN will not adopt a peacekeeping operation in Somalia.

Divergence on Sudan

¶11. (C) In contrast to Somalia, U.S. and AU approaches to Sudan diverge, Ping told Yates. There is agreement on the objectives. The AU wants to fight impunity. It wants former Chadian leader Hissein Habre to face trial. However, the AU differs on the best way to go about it. Unlike the U.S., the AU supports an Article 16 deferral of the ICC arrest warrant.

¶12. (C) Yates conveyed to Ping the fears of the U.S. and others that the Government of Sudan's expulsion of some NGOs from Darfur in retaliation for the ICC arrest warrant will take its toll on a great number of Darfuris. Ping replied that the Government of Sudan had agreed to join the AU and the UN on a commission to examine the NGO situation in Darfur. At this time, the GOS is unwilling to reverse its decision to expel 13 NGOs out of the more than 120 operating there, but the government may elect not to expel further NGOs. With regard to GOS assertions that Sudan could fill the gap of humanitarian services created with the departure of the 13 NGOs, Ping said the AU has doubts this could be achieved.

¶13. (C) In order to satisfy the AU and convince it to adopt a position that is closer to the U.S. position, Ping said the GOS must demonstrate progress on three fronts with regard to Darfur. The government must ensure the continued deployment of UNAMID troops to the region, promote

ADDIS ABAB 00000734 003 OF 003

political dialogue with the rebel groups, and address how the Sudanese judiciary is going to prosecute Darfur war crimes issues. Recently, the AU appointed a high-level panel on Darfur headed by former South African President Thabo Mbeki to recommend Sudanese solutions for bringing responsible parties to justice. (Note: An AU spokesperson told USAU that panel members will travel to Sudan before the end of March. End Note.)

¶14. (C) As he did at the time of his meeting with then Acting A/S for African Affairs Phil Carter on the margins of the AU Summit in February, Ping told Yates that an Article 16 deferral of the ICC arrest warrant would give peace a chance. Instead, Sudan is now at risk of becoming a breeding ground for terrorists with links to Al Qaida, he warned. "Sudan is ready for war. Why do you want another Iraq?" Ping said the ICC's decision to pursue Bashir also has emboldened Darfur's rebel groups who may now take aim at UNAMID troops. The ICC's timing was "irresponsible." In conclusion, he expressed the hope that the AU and the U.S. could work together to "pacify" the continent.

¶15. (U) Ambassador Yates has approved this message.
YAMAMOTO